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AUTHOR Willie, Reynold; Kummerow, Jean M.
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ABSTRACT

Replies of 1400 elementary and secondary teachers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota) metropolitan area to a mail survey revealed that teachers: (1) held a particular interest in examining personal goals, learning about alternative careers, and learning new methods of teaching; (2) preferred activities in school buildings where they worked rather than on the campus of the university generating the course; (3) preferred evening and afternoon hours for instruction; (4) preferred workshops and conferences to classes; and (5) believed that credit need not necessarily be given for learning activities. It is concluded that continuing teacher education programs should be designed to include topics and formats not ordinarily conceived as continuing teacher education, but nonetheless accepted as such by teachers. Tables show career and professional interests, personal development interests, and significant differences between male and female respondents and by teaching level. (Authors/FG)

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Career, Professional, and Personal Development Interests of Classroom Teachers

Reynold Willie, Ph. D.
Associate Professor
175 Peik Hall
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 376-7669

Jean M. Kummerow, Ph. D.
Staff Psychologist
Hobert-Martin Consulting
Psychologists
4028 IDS Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402
(612) 338-8461

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Abstract

This paper describes a search for the professional and personal interests of teachers and the instructional formats preferred by teachers for continuing professional education activities. A mail survey of a random ten percent sample of classroom teachers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota) greater metropolitan area revealed that teachers (1) held a particular interest in examining personal goals, learning about alternative careers, and learning new methods of teaching; (2) preferred activities in school buildings rather than on campus; (3) saw both evening and afternoon hours as feasible times for instruction; (4) preferred workshops and conferences to classes; and (5) believed that credit need not necessarily be attached to activities. The authors conclude that continuing teacher education programs should be designed to include topics not ordinarily conceived as continuing professional education but nonetheless accepted as such by teachers.

This has been a decade of continuing teacher education. This form of teacher education has a long history but it has received more than usual attention during recent years because of innovations in education, changes in student behavior, and modifications of regulations for teacher recertification and relicensure. Colleges and universities have played an important role in the development of continuing teacher education but, at the same time, because of limited resources, they have subordinated it to undergraduate and graduate education. Unfortunately, its development has often been determined by faculty members' willingness to work on an overtime, extra pay basis rather than by program considerations and teacher needs. But now declining enrollments in undergraduate and graduate programs and the consequent freeing of resources are allowing colleges and universities to move continuing teacher education from the periphery to the center of activity. Difficult decisions must be made. College and university activities must be matched to teacher needs and interests. If they are not, colleges and universities may find themselves playing an increasingly diminishing role in continuing teacher education in the next decade.

To assist the College of Education, University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus (Minneapolis), in the planning of educational activities responsive to the interests of teachers, we undertook this study with four purposes in mind:

1. To gain a clearer understanding of the interests--both personal and professional--of in-service teachers in the immediate geographic area.

2. To identify the people and institutions teachers view as appropriate providers of assistance in pursuing their interests.

3. To discover the hours of the day and times of the year when teachers prefer to engage in continuing education activities.

4. To determine the instructional formats most appealing to teachers.

The study took the form of survey research using a mailed questionnaire as the data gathering tool. It concentrated on the teachers in a limited geographic area--the metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul--and analyzed data from the viewpoint of one teacher education institution--the College of Education, University of Minnesota (Twin Cities Campus). Despite the two restrictions placed on the study, it is likely that planners in other institutions can glean from the report information which will be of value to them in their planning.

Methodology

The Sample

The College of Education, University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus, is located in the heart of a densely populated metropolitan area covering seven counties and including approximately one-half of the state's nearly four million residents. The area is divided into fifty-four public school districts of varying sizes. In 1977-78 the districts employed approximately 21,000 classroom teachers and, in addition, hundreds of administrators and other support personnel. The Minnesota State Department of Education (Education Data Systems) provided a systematic random sample of ten percent of the teacher population. The sample was also representative of various subgroups of teachers such as males, females, elementary, and secondary. It numbered 2,069 classroom teachers.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire grew out of interviews with inservice teachers and from discussions with colleagues in various academic, service, and administrative units in the University. After pretests and revisions, the final form of the questionnaire sought information in four areas: (1) career-professional interests; (2) personal development interests; (3) potential sources of assistance in pursuing those interests; and (4) preferred instructional formats, credit and credit types, sites, and times for continuing education activities. Questions were phrased in closed form to facilitate quantification and analysis. An "other" category was included with some questions to accomodate unexpected responses.

Participation in the survey was voluntary; teachers who did not wish to participate were asked to return blank questionnaires. Of the 2,069 teachers in the sample, 1,581 (76.4%) returned their copies of the instrument of which 1,400 (67.7%) were complete and usable. The respondents were representative of the public school teachers in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Of the 1,400 respondents 789 were females (56.4%) and 604 were males (43.1%). Seven respondents did not report sex (.5%). They ranged in age from 22 to 65 years with a median age of 37.05 years. Their experience ranged from one to 40 years with a mean years of experience of 12.2. Over half (55.1%) indicated their highest level of education as

"bachelor degree + credits" and over one-fourth (27.9%) as "master's degree + credits". Slightly more than one-third (35.2%) of the sample held degrees from the University of Minnesota; 17.6% were enrolled in degree programs at the time of data gathering; and 57.7% had taken coursework at the University of Minnesota in the five year period just prior to the study. Forty percent (40.4%) identified themselves as elementary teachers and forty-four percent (44.4%) as secondary teachers. The remaining teachers identified themselves as early childhood (2.5%), middle school (5.6%), post-secondary (5.1%), or other (4.1%).

A packaged computer program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), was used to analyze the data. Responses for the total group and for various subgroups such as males, females, elementary, and secondary were analyzed. In each subgroup analysis a Chi-square statistic was calculated on each questionnaire item to test independence. When the large numbers in this study were entered into the equation, relatively small differences between groups led to significant Chi-square values ($p \leq .01$).

The Total Group: Career-Professional and Personal Development Interests

The questionnaire asked teachers to indicate their career-professional interests on a list of one open and ten closed items and to indicate their personal development interests on another list of three open and ten closed items. Teachers were encouraged to respond to as many items as they wished. They checked an average of four career-professional and three personal development interest items. Over half indicated two of the closed career-professional items as important to them--to learn about alternative careers (59.6%) and to learn new ways

of teaching (59.4%). Table 1 presents career-professional interests ranked according to frequency of selection. Over half of the respondents also indicated one of the ten closed personal development items as important to them--to examine goals (65.9%). Table 2 presents personal development interests ranked according to the same criterion.

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

The Total Group: Sources of Assistance

The questionnaire asked the respondents to indicate three preferred sources of help in pursuing their interests. The University of Minnesota was viewed as a source of assistance for career-professional interests by 67.9% of the total group and for personal development interests by 40.6%. In the career-professional category the University was 21.3 percentage points higher than the next ranking source--local colleges or universities other than the University of Minnesota (46.6%)--and 26.8 percentage points higher than the third ranking source--fellow educators (41.1%). Teachers' organizations ranked fourth with 34.1% of the teachers checking the item; private organizations and practitioners ranked fifth with 28.9% checking the item. Other potential sources of assistance were selected by less than 25% of the total group.

The University of Minnesota was viewed as a source of assistance for personal development interests by 40.6% of the respondents. The University was 8.5 percentage points higher than the second ranking

source--fellow educators (32.1%)--and 12.4 percentage points higher than the third ranking source--local colleges or universities other than the University of Minnesota (28.2%). The item, private organizations and practitioners, was selected by 27.9% of the teachers. All other potential sources of assistance were selected by less than 25% of those responding.

The Total Group: Instructional Formats, Sites, and Times

Teachers were asked to indicate preferred delivery methods, sites, and times. Although they were asked to check up to three items, some checked more. They cited workshops and conferences (79.4%), small group sessions (56.9%), and classes (49.5%) most frequently. Fewer than 25% checked self-directed work, individual sessions, and newsletters. Teachers were asked to indicate one preferred site for continuing education activities but some indicated more than one. They checked school buildings (50.7%) and retreat centers (25.4%) most often. On-campus was checked by 16.2% and no preference by 15.1% of the teachers in the total sample. Responding to time questions, teachers checked time of day in the following order: late afternoon (45.4%), evening (43.7%), weekend (20.2%), and daytime (13.7%). They indicated a preference for fall quarter (44.7%) over winter quarter (35.4%) and for winter quarter over spring quarter (27.8%). Again, some teachers responded to more than one item.

The Total Group: Credits

Of the 1,400 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 61.4% indicated that credits were preferred while 29.7% indicated that credits were unnecessary. Since not all teachers responded to the item, percentages do not total 100. We asked those who indicated a preference for

credit to select a type of credit. Of those responding to this item, 46.9% chose college credit, 18.6% chose other types of credit such as the Continuing Education Unit (CEU), and 11.2% chose school district credit.

Of the teachers in the total group 56.9% indicated that they would enroll, attend, participate in an activity if the College of Education were to offer something in their areas of interest; 36.8% indicated that they were undecided. Only 4.7% responded that they would not attend and 1.6% gave no response to the item.

The Subgroups

Analysis of responses of the two subgroups (sex and teaching level), revealed statistically signficant differences on many items. However, reported here are only those which meet the following criteria: (1) at least 25% of the group responded to the item; (2) the difference between groups was at least ten percentage points; and (3) $p \leq .001$.

By Sex. Data were available on 789 females and 604 males. The average age of the females was 36.0 years and of males 38.4 years. The average length of teaching experience for females was 11.2 years and for males 13.6 years. Of the females 53.7% taught in elementary schools and of the males 23.5% taught at that level. Table 3 presents the items to which males and females tended to respond differently.

Insert Table 3 about here

By Teaching Level. From the total group a subset containing all elementary and secondary teachers was drawn. This subset totaled 1,188 respondents or 84.9% of the total. Table 4 presents the differences which meet the three criteria described above.

Insert Table 4 about here

Summary and Conclusions

The purposes of the study, given earlier in this report, are reflected in the questions to which we were seeking answers:

What areas of interest--both career-professional and personal development--do teachers identify as important to them?

The two interests most frequently checked by teachers in the study--to examine personal goals (65.9%) and to learn about alternative careers (59.6%)--are generally not addressed systematically in continuing teacher education programs of colleges and universities. Interest in these two areas lends support to the concept of career development as a life-long process rather than a short-term process of the teens and early twenties. Perhaps these interests can more easily and efficiently be satisfied through participation in the activities of university units such as counseling offices and colleges other than education. Whatever is done, however, should be done by decision rather than through default. For the unit which provides the service, a potential and substantial market appears to exist.

Another interest--nearly as strong as those above--was in new methods of teaching (59.4%). Of all the classes offered through the day school during late afternoon and Saturdays, through the University's

extension unit, and through the summer session, perhaps most are offered with the intent of helping teachers learn new methods. This, then, appears to be one of the best areas of "match" between teachers and the College of Education at the University of Minnesota. We suspect that this is true in other teacher education institutions as well.

Nearly forty-five percent of the respondents selected the item on learning new classroom management methods as an area of interest. The difficulty of managing students today and the resultant stress placed upon teachers have recently been highlighted by many news and information sources. Some of the program areas do give considerable attention to the issue of classroom management but, in view of the large number of teachers who checked the item, efforts may not be sufficient to satisfy the need.

What people and what institutions do teachers view as resources in pursuing their interests?

Over half (55.7%) of the teachers in the study had attended the University of Minnesota during the five year period immediately preceding the study. One would therefore expect the University to be viewed as a source of assistance by a large percentage of the respondents. Teachers in this sample did chose the University far more frequently than they chose other institutions or individuals. Nonetheless, fellow educators, teachers' organizations, and private organizations and practitioners are also perceived by teachers as providers of assistance in pursuing career, professional, and personal development interests.

At what times and in what places do teachers prefer to engage in continuing education activities?

Despite the commonly held belief that after school hours are poor continuing education hours, most activities offered by both school districts and colleges occur at those times. Many teachers do prefer late afternoon: 50.2% of the elementary teachers checked after school hours. However, 37.5% of the elementary preferred evening hours. Percentages for secondary were reversed with 38.7% preferring late afternoon and 49.7% favoring evening hours. Differing scheduling patterns may attract many teachers who have found it inconvenient or even impossible to attend classes as currently timed.

For time of year 44.7% of the teachers in the total group indicated a preference for continuing education during the fall quarter, 35.4% a preference for winter quarter, 27.8% a preference for spring quarter, and 28.1% a preference for summer. Men expressed their first choice as winter quarter (43.9%), their second choice as fall (40.1%), and their third choice as spring (24.3%). These responses suggest that colleges might well find greater responses from teachers to their outreach instructional and service activities if more of those activities are scheduled during fall and winter rather than during spring and summer.

Enrollments in classes are likely to be affected by the interactions of time and location. In this study teachers indicated a strong preference for school buildings (50.7%) over retreat centers (25.4%) and over the University campus (15.2%). If thoughtful consideration is given to time and site for each continuing education activity, perhaps more continuing

education will take place off-campus and the charge that offerings are planned for the convenience of college faculty rather than inservice teachers may lessen. If sites with adequate facilities and appropriate library resources are established away from campus, the problem of parking, common to this and many other urban campuses, may be eliminated.

What instructional formats do teachers prefer?

In this study 79.4% of the teachers in the total group indicated a preference for workshops and conferences, 56.9% a preference for small groups sessions, and 49.5% a preference for classes. In addition 46.9% indicated that college credit should be attached to continuing education activity. With a wide variety of personal and professional development activities now being accepted to meet requirements for recertification and relicensure and with college credits sometimes being viewed by teachers as handicaps in the search for employment, an aggressive exploration of activities and measures other than classes and college credits should be carried on.

We believe that the results of this investigation favor the continuance of the efforts which colleges and universities are currently devoting to programs for teachers in service. Teacher interest does play a very important role in continuing education, however. We suggest, therefore, that with the addition of new areas of study and with greater variety in instructional formats, types of credit, sites, and hours those programs may take on greater vitality. Without that vitality, we must accept the likelihood of decreasing enrollments as competition from other providers--both public and private--increases.

Table 1

Career-Professional Interests of Teachers (N=1400)

Interests	N	%
1. To learn about alternative careers	834	59.6
2. To learn new ways of teaching	831	59.4
3. To find new goals within education	626	44.7
4. To learn new class management techniques	624	44.6
5. To learn more evaluation skills	606	43.3
6. To learn more about my subject matter	492	35.1
7. To improve curriculum development skills	467	33.4
8. To learn more about issues in education	460	32.9
9. To learn about mainstreaming	365	26.1
10. To learn job hunting strategies	324	23.1
11. Other	85	6.1

Table 2

Personal Development Interests of Teachers (N=1400)

Interests	N	%
1. To examine my goals	923	65.9
2. To improve relationship with students	508	36.3
3. To feel surer of self	492	35.1
4. To improve relationship with co-workers	412	29.4
5. To improve relationship with spouse	409	29.2
6. To improve relationship with friends	350	25.0
7. To improve relationship with children	300	21.4
8. To improve relationship with students' parents	295	21.1
9. To improve relationship with administrators	237	16.9
10. To handle personal problems	166	11.9
11. To improve relationship with parents	88	6.3
12. Other	54	3.9
13. To improve relationship with _____	50	3.6

Table 3

Significant Differences on Questionnaire Items between Males (N=604) and Females (N=789)

Questionnaire Item	% female checking	% male checking	p-value
Career-Professional Interests			
To learn new class management techniques	50.2	37.3	.0000
To learn more evaluation skills	49.0	35.8	.0000
Personal Interest			
To feel surer of self	40.3	28.5	.0000
Instructional Formats			
No credit necessary	25.5	35.6	.0001
Credit preferred	66.9	54.3	.0000
College credit	51.3	41.1	.0002
Late afternoon	51.5	37.7	.0000
Winter	29.2	43.9	.0000

Table 4

Significant and Practical Differences on Questionnaire Items between Elementary (N=566) and Secondary (N=622) Teachers

Questionnaire Item	% elementary checking	% secondary checking	p-value
Career-Professional Interests			
To learn new class management techniques	53.2	38.4	.0000
To learn more evaluation skills	50.7	37.0	.0000
Instructional Formats			
Late afternoon	50.2	38.7	.0001
Evening	37.5	49.7	.0000